

# Change Management for Radiologists

Howard Fleishon, MD<sup>a</sup>, Lawrence R. Muroff, MD<sup>b</sup>, Sumir S. Patel, MD<sup>a</sup>

## Abstract

*Change management* refers to the research, science, and tools that prepare, equip, and enable individuals to adopt transformation successfully. Implementation of this discipline involves familiarity with an organization's culture, people, and structure. Several frameworks exist within which radiologists can successfully apply these concepts. With changes occurring within health care and within the field of radiology itself, it will be increasingly important for radiologists to familiarize themselves with and adopt the principles of change management in their practices.

**Key Words:** Change management, organizational culture, strategic planning, transformation

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## INTRODUCTION

The specialty of radiology is constantly changing. New modalities and evolving protocols are increasing our clinical capabilities. Technological advances such as deep learning continually challenge and expand our specialty. Along with the political and financial dynamics of health care reform, the pace of change seems to be accelerating. Almost every radiology organization is experiencing dramatic transformations as we face regulatory mandates and socioeconomic pressures along with culture movements such as the American College of Radiology's Imaging 3.0.

For any organization, implementing change can be disruptive. Change management has emerged as a recognized discipline that has been embraced by leading corporations. The principles of change management as applied to radiology have been featured at a variety of industry and professional conferences [1-5]. Change management has also been discussed at the past two Radiology Leadership Institute Annual Summits; however, there have been relatively few articles dealing with this topic in the radiology

literature. Most radiologists understand that change is happening, but they are unaware of the principles and tool sets available to help guide their practices and organizations through these potentially dramatic transitions.

## DEFINITION OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

*Change management* refers to the research, science, and tools that prepare, equip, and enable individuals to adopt transformation successfully. Although change management focuses on the individual, a related subject matter, organizational change management, considers the full organization and what it needs to do to change. Although the definitions are specific, the terms are often used interchangeably [6].

Change management is concentrated on how to implement successful transformations: how to get from the status quo to a desired change. The subject matter is the theory, tools, and methods of guiding an organization through a change process, as opposed to the strategic decision making that determined that change was necessary. Authorities in business education have come to recognize how vital these considerations can be for successful organizations. Metrics for success include achieving the targeted transformation, efficient utilization of resources, minimizing unnecessary disruption or conflict, and reaching sustainability.

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its

<sup>a</sup>Department of Radiology and Medical Imaging, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>b</sup>Imaging Consultants, Inc. Tampa, Florida.

Corresponding author and reprints: Howard Fleishon, MD, Emory University, Department of Radiology and Medical Imaging, c/o Emory St. Josephs Hospital, Department of Radiology, 5665 Peachtree Dunwoody Rd, Atlanta, GA 30342; e-mail: [hbf@cox.net](mailto:hbf@cox.net).

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success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things.

—Niccolo Machiavelli

## HISTORY OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Before the 1990s, few publications in the business literature referred to change management. A pioneer in organizational development, Richard Beckhard, identified the process of change as a distinct “effort” [7]. William Bridges is credited with being the first author to address the human side of change. He described states of transition as the ending, the neutral zone, and the new beginning [8].

In the 1990s, change management became popularized by industries (especially technology firms) undergoing rapid change. Change management theory was driven by leading consulting firms working with several Fortune 500 companies, such as GE’s “Change Acceleration Process” [9]. The structured approaches that emerged became popular as they proved to reduce both costs and risk. During this period, several seminal books were published that related to the people side of change management theory. Lexicon began to form. Many of the guiding principles that survive today evolved during this period. These works, such as John Kotter’s “Eight Step Process for Leading Change,” served to bring change management into the mainstream of business theory [10-16].

The 2000s marked the formalization of change management as a discipline. Additional research provided practical, scalable, and reproducible tools and processes that could be applied to change projects. In this era, the people side of change management grew in both awareness and credibility. Organizations began creating job positions specifically for the implementation of change management.

Further formalization of the discipline occurred with the launching of the Association of Change Management Professionals. In parallel, a drive began to create standardization and certification for the profession.

Today, many organizations are looking to institutionalize change management. Standardization is becoming an expected and important element of most corporate projects. Leading companies are establishing “change leadership” competencies, training employees from frontline workers to top management.

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT FOR RADIOLOGISTS

Change might be internally driven versus externally mandated. With respect to internal change, the goal is

often to improve something—service, turnaround time, efficiency, better economic return, and structured reports. External mandates may include changes in laws, methods of reimbursement, or the development of new technologies. These changes, whether based in process or culture, planned or unplanned, voluntary or imposed, all have a common process for implementation: change management.

Implementation of such operational or strategic plans can be disruptive for both the practice managers and the radiologists. Considerable energy, time, and resources can be consumed by these efforts. Therefore, utilization of the science and discipline of change management in radiology presents an important opportunity. Preplanning for a new or altered structure and acquiring skill sets focusing on the process of transformation contribute to the success and sustainability of these projects.

Beer and Nohria have posited that there are two basic theories of change [17]. In one, Theory O, there is a focus on what has traditionally been deemed the “soft” side of implementing change. Areas of concentration within this theory include the idea of creating a new culture, building strong emotional connections with employees and colleagues, and strengthening teamwork skills. The other, Theory E, highlights the economic value of a change initiative. Though increased economic value is generally defined in shareholder returns, the concept is easily translated to a radiology practice where additional measures such as patient outcomes, patient satisfaction, ordering provider satisfaction, and report turnaround time can be optimized. Most often, practice leaders will need to employ a skillful combination of these theories in the implementation of a change management project.

Various templates for change management have been published and are well established. These models continue to be refined and newer models are proposed as the science and discipline mature [18,19]. The references should help radiologists identify a change management model that works best for each practice or organization. Many of the more popularized systems include the following principles:

- **Articulate the reason for change.** Develop a compelling argument delineating why the practice must move away from the status quo. Create a sense of urgency that change must occur now. Appropriate information should be provided to partners and employees so that everyone understands why going into

the unknown is the preferred alternative to the existing situation.

- **Build the team.** Assembling the needed cadre of people who will be tasked with implementing change is essential to success. Choices include a complex consideration of influence, talent, skill, and experience. If internal resources are not sufficient, consultants or additional hires may be needed.
- **Create the vision.** What will the new change look like and why is it preferable to the current circumstance? What will be the benefits for both the practice or organization and its individual members? The story needs to be impactful, not only for the shareholders, but for all stakeholders.
- **Leverage networks.** Credibility and relationships built through networking have been shown to be key influencers for change agents. Formal structure and informal networks coexist in any organization. Networks can be leveraged to build critical mass and achieve the “tipping point” number of stakeholders necessary to move change initiatives forward. “Bridging” networks can extend established relationships [20].
- **Hypercommunicate.** Keep stakeholders aware of the progress of the project. Celebrate the milestones. Circumvent the spread of rumors and negativity by demonstrating transparency. Consider a variety of outlets for messaging. Assign communication responsibilities such that the information flow is constant and consistent.
- **Strive for sustainability.** Once established, the change continually needs to be emphasized as the “new normal.” Leadership and management should reinforce the position that the change has been incorporated and is the new path forward. Contingency plans for problems or glitches should be developed to prevent the practice or organization from reverting to its old equilibrium. New metrics and dashboards reflecting the change should be established and highlighted.

## CULTURE

Culture is a key determinant in change management implementation and successful transitions in any organization. Culture can be defined as the sum of the interactions, expectations, and relationships of staff and leadership in an organization [21]. Simplistically, culture is the way that a like-minded group of individuals think and act. To survive over time, the culture must be resilient and responsive to both internal and external

pressures. Radiologists share a culture that differentiates us as a group and defines us as a specialty [22].

Culture is *critical* to business success and critical to the success and survival of radiology. The late business management guru Peter Drucker is alleged to have said that “culture eats strategy for breakfast,” yet often culture gets overlooked or neglected. Studies [23,24] indicate a correlation between financial results and a strong, inspiring organizational culture. A survey of more than 2,200 global businesspeople noted that culture was widely seen as more important than companies’ strategies or operating models. In this same survey, only 53% of respondents said that culture is an important part of the leadership agenda at their company; even fewer (35%) said their companies do an effective job of managing culture [25].

Cultures are complex and more difficult to change through the same mechanisms (or at the same pace) as other parts of an organization. Many legacy organizations rely on the status quo; consistency and security are strong motivators for established employees. Within these companies, if the transformational changes conflict with established culture, the process will be much more difficult.

In contrast, several leading-edge organizations have developed cultures based on change. Companies such as Google, Facebook, and Apple have embedded change as a crucial part of their philosophy. Change and disruption are not only incorporated but incentivized. They actively manage to avoid uniformity and groupthink. Teams are encouraged to disrupt business models internally to create new opportunities.

Although culture by its nature tends to be resistant to change, it can be a facilitator of organizational change. If the change management team can align the transformational initiatives with the strong cultural attributes of the company, it is more likely to build the momentum necessary to create lasting change. By tapping into existing energy and emotional commitments within cultures, change initiatives have a greater chance for success and are more sustainable [23].

Changing the culture of an organization is a deeper dive. As new behaviors manifest in personal and corporate successes, cultures can morph and transform, but this transformation involves a much longer time frame. The alternative for immediate culture change is a reorganization that is often highly disruptive.

## PEOPLE AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A significant consideration in modern change management theory is the effect of organizational change on

individuals. It is essential to be vigilant that change is both situational and psychological. Personnel are one of the most valued assets of any organization. Any organizational change will impact the identities of individuals involved in the change process. Changes to the status quo can be threatening or disorienting to key employees. Some changes may even result in displacement of people or elimination of jobs.

During any change project, those affected may deal with emotions such as complacency, anger, pessimism, cynicism, panic, insecurity, and anxiety. Along with the structural challenges, these emotional alterations can undermine change projects. The challenge is to turn these negative feelings into positive proactive emotions such as trust, optimism, pride, passion, excitement, hope, and enthusiasm.

To emphasize the importance of the emotional side of change, one of the pioneers of the field, John Kotter, stressed that exhaustive data-based analyses rarely change how people react and feel. He urged that the “analyze-think-change” mind-set of managers evolve to be a “see-feel-change” approach [26]. When behavior is fueled by emotion, it is more likely to last longer than when fueled by analysis, because it will be resistant to negative emotions such as cynicism and rumination, which often are driven by faulty analysis and a skewed interpretation of the facts.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR RADIOLOGY PRACTICES

Change initiatives in any organization have a notably high failure rate, as high as 70%, regardless of scale or timeline for the project [17]. Probability frameworks can be applied such as DICE, which relies on a weighted average of several variables: *duration* of the project, the *integrity* of the skill set of the group undertaking the change, the *commitment* of senior leadership, and the amount of extra *effort* that employees must put in for the change to occur [27]. Generally, the shorter the duration of a given project, the higher its chances are for success.

Change is often driven by a sense of urgency [14,22]. For radiology practices, the urgency is often triggered by a crisis such as a hospital demanding to renegotiate a contract or threatening to send out a request for proposal inviting other practices to submit a proposal to replace the incumbent radiology group. In such cases, there often is not time for a measured approach to a needed culture change. For that reason, groups should

plan for the future through methods including proactive strategy and both strategic and scenario planning.

Proactive strategy is usually accomplished in a series of steps. First, an honest assessment of the group should be made, including an evaluation of the strengths and the deficiencies of each practice member. These evaluations should not be a forum for assigning blame, but rather an educational opportunity for each radiologist to understand how other group members perceive him or her. Deficiencies (clinical and nonclinical) should be remediated before they cause major problems for the practice [26].

Strategic planning provides direction for the group, and scenario planning permits practice leaders the opportunity to respond to issues while they are still theoretical.

Two scenarios that practices might consider are:

- What steps should we take when the hospital CEO says that in the next month he will be sending out a request for proposal for radiology services to regional groups and national entrepreneurial radiology companies?
- What steps should we take when the hospital CEO says that in 60 days the health care system will begin participating in a bundled payment project that will impact 65% of our revenue? How can we determine what we are entitled to receive as payment for our radiology services [22]?

## SUMMARY

Radiologists will continue to face significant challenges. The status quo will no longer be sufficient to ensure stability in your practice or tenure in your hospital; radiologists must be prepared to think and act differently. Change is not optional; rather, it is an imperative for survival.

Change management has become recognized as a critical discipline in modern business literature. With the rapid pace of change in health care, change management presents a valuable opportunity for radiologists as we address challenges. Critical considerations of change include the psychosocial impact on individuals and the relationship to culture. Identifying and addressing predictable issues will help increase a project's chance of success. Practice leaders should view these adjustments through a change management lens to better understand and clarify the strategic methods for success.

Change management is a skill set that will both enable and drive new processes. Knowledge of the principles and tools available will facilitate the implementation and sustainability of transitions for our departments and practices.

### TAKE-HOME POINTS

- Change within radiology is inevitable, ongoing, and oftentimes disruptive.
- Change management refers to the research, science, and tools that prepare, equip, and enable individuals to adopt transformation successfully.
- Culture, though complex and difficult to change, is vital to consider in any change management project.
- Change management projects can be pre-emptively studied for probability of success and adjusted to increase this probability.
- Radiologists can utilize change management frameworks to successfully navigate and lead during uncertainty.

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